

TUESDAY -
MAY 15, 2007

EAGLE TIMES

County delegation gets testy

Financial disagreements lead to meeting walkouts

By AARON ALDRIDGE
Staff Writer

Political infighting and personal attacks were not originally part of the agenda at a special Sullivan County Delegation meeting, where the county manager and one representative walked out in disgust Monday morning.



Newport

"I don't see where this is going and I'm not going on a witch hunt," said state representative and delegation member Beverly Rodeschin, R-Newport, before walking out.

The meeting was called by delegation chairman Rep. Peter Franklin, D-Newport, to ask County Manager Ed Gil de Rubio questions about the county budget and how taxpayer money was being spent.

Gil de Rubio presented a preliminary report from the county accountant on third-quarter financials and a cash flow analysis. He asked Franklin to speak with the accountant if he had any specific questions about the budget numbers.

"The county manager and I have a difficult time coming to any agreement on anything," Franklin said.

Gil de Rubio responded and told Franklin that if he had any problems, he should take up the issue with the county commissioners.

"I work for the commissioners," Gil de Rubio said. "Take it up with them."

See **COUNTY** - Page A5

Franklin responded, "I have an issue with you," but he did not elaborate and Gil de Rubio walked out.

"We would have gotten the information from the county manager if he were competent in his job," Franklin said.

After Gil de Rubio and Rodeschin left the meeting, Franklin said he was considering asking the delegation to rescind the authority to spend money from a \$2 million Tax Anticipation Note because he said he was not provided with enough information from Gil de Rubio.

According to Sullivan County treasurer Cynthia Sweeney, the TAN was issued in mid-April to pay the wages of county employees. The TAN is in the form of a low-interest loan from a bank used to pay daily county expenses before tax money from county towns is received.

If Franklin decides to withdraw the authority of the county treasurer to use money from the TAN to pay the county's bills, the county could essentially shut down, Gil de Rubio said.

"It's a nightmare waiting to happen," Gil de Rubio said. "I don't know what we would do."

Before Rodeschin left the meeting, she questioned whether the TAN was appropriately issued and placed out for bid to get the lowest interest rate.

"It should definitely go out for bid," Gil de Rubio said. "It always has in the past."

According to Sullivan County Commissioner Ethel Jarvis, the treasurer is not required to get bids for a TAN.

"It doesn't have to go out to bid at all," Jarvis said during a telephone interview. "It's a short-term loan."

During a telephone interview after the meeting, Sweeney said she did not technically put the TAN out for bid, but instead received three unsolicited bids from three banks. She said she chose Lake Sunapee Savings Bank because it offered the lowest interest rate.

"Lake Sunapee Bank was below prime," Sweeney said. "It was lower than any others."

Sweeney said she is only using the TAN money to pay county employee wages and has withdrawn money twice since it was issued. She said she used \$300,000 in April when the TAN was approved and an additional \$350,000 on Monday.

"I've pulled from it twice to pay wages," she said.

"That's all we've used it for."

The meeting began with Sullivan County Health Care administrator Scott Wojkiewicz giving an overview of nursing home finances to the delegation. Franklin quizzed Wojkiewicz on specific numbers and calculations in the budget.

"The quality of care at Sullivan County is better than a majority of facilities in the area," Wojkiewicz said. "But Sullivan County is highly political. No matter what happens at the facility, it's on the front page of the paper. Our facility is in no more turmoil than any other facility."

Wojkiewicz said the political infighting among the delegation has made his job more difficult.

"I could fill every bed if the infighting would stop," Wojkiewicz said.

Rodeschin agreed.

"We've got to stop this," Rodeschin told Franklin. "We do not micromanage the nursing home."

As for the nursing home budget, Wojkiewicz said he hopes to break even by the end of the fiscal year.

"It's really going to depend on the census," Wojkiewicz said.

Wojkiewicz said the problem he is having at the nursing home is meeting the anticipated budget numbers.

"We are being underfunded dramatically for Medicaid patients," Wojkiewicz said. "If we dealt strictly with Medicaid patients, we would go bankrupt in five months."

Wojkiewicz also told the delegation that the nursing home was not ready to stand alone and function without the help of Genesis, a consulting firm hired by the county to manage the nursing home.

"If you let Genesis leave today, you would be in trouble almost immediately," Wojkiewicz told the delegation. "By dropping Genesis, I think you would immediately start to feel the burden."

After Gil de Rubio and Rodeschin walked out, Franklin continued the meeting discussing cash flow within the county and questioned whether county commissioners were doing their job.

"I believe it's very clear the county manager works for you as county commissioners and acts as your agent," Franklin said. "Sometimes it seems like things get reversed."

Franklin then suspended the meeting and tentatively scheduled it to reconvene next Monday at 1 p.m. He did not specify the location.